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**Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services**

# Review of the structure and operations of United Nations information centres

## Note by the Secretary-General

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B of 29 July 1994 and 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit, for the attention of the General Assembly, the attached report, conveyed to him by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, on the review of the structure and operations of United Nations information centres.

2. The Secretary-General takes note of the findings and concurs with the thrust of the recommendations made in the report, which will serve to streamline and revitalize the operation of information centres by the Department of Public Information and optimize the benefit of the Organization's financial and human resource investment in that activity. The Secretary-General is pleased to note that the Department of Public Information is already taking steps to address the issues highlighted in the report through implementation of the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

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# Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of the structure and operations of United Nations information centres

*Summary*

In 1946, the General Assembly, in annex I to its resolution 13 (I), set out the terms of reference for the Department of Public Information and called upon the Department to establish branch offices in order to ensure that people in all parts of the world receive as full information as possible about the United Nations. United Nations information centres are the principal local sources of public information about the United Nations system. The budget for the biennium 2002-2003 of the Department's public information work at the field level amounted to $46.5 million.

Based on its comprehensive audit, the Office of Internal Oversight Services issued a detailed internal audit report to the Department of Public Information on 14 October 2002, which included findings and recommendations on a wide range of issues relating to United Nations information centres. Since the development of a new operating concept for the information centres is an important element of the reform of the Department of Public Information, the management of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and of the Department of Public Information agreed that it would be relevant to submit the highlights of the internal audit report through the Secretary-General to the General Assembly and the Committee on Information.

At the time of the audit, the Office of Internal Oversight Services found it difficult to assess the relevance, impact and effectiveness of United Nations information centres, principally because the tools and data required for measuring and demonstrating the centres' performance and effect were insufficient. Furthermore, mandates, goals and strategies for the United Nations information centre operation had not been re-examined and updated by the Department of Public Information to take into account regional information needs and changing regional and global circumstances.

Until now, United Nations information centres were not required to prepare and submit annual work plans to the Department of Public Information for review and approval. The major tool for evaluating their performance and impact is the monthly report that provides statistics on communications activities of the centres. However, at the time of the audit, only one third of the centres were submitting such reports on a regular basis.

In several instances, the number and level of posts favoured United Nations information centres located in developed countries without adequate explanation or justification, although there are certain established criteria for the equitable allocation of resources, such as those contained in document A/AC.198/2001/5. During 2001, rent and office maintenance costs constituted almost 40 per cent of total non-staff operating costs of the centres. A significant amount of those funds is expended on centres located in the capital cities of developed countries. Some centres are under-resourced, particularly with regard to funds for travel. In certain areas, the lack of travel funds restricted the centres to providing only very limited coverage of the host country or region.

Inconsistent reporting by United Nations information centres precluded a full analysis of the usage of library facilities. However, available data shows a lack of "traffic" in a number of centres. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommended that all centres immediately establish, with guidance from the Department of Public Information, a reliable database, including a profile of library visitors, and report that data to the Department for analysis to determine the need for maintaining library facilities.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services review highlighted the need for an urgent rethinking of the concept of United Nations information centres in terms of usefulness and continued relevance and for closer assessment of various operational and resource issues. The Department of Public Information needs to update the goals, strategies and objectives of the United Nations information centre operation at the global and regional levels as part of a comprehensive review. United Nations information centres in developing countries require a different managerial approach from those located in developed countries, which have easy public access to the Internet and library facilities. The Department should assess the need for centres in developed countries and review their current number, particularly because those centres are absorbing the bulk of available staff and funding resources.

To address the foregoing issues, the Department of Public Information should immediately undertake an in-depth evaluation of the options available, such as:

- Restructuring United Nations information centres on a region-by-region basis with a view to consolidation, merger or liquidation
- Proposing to integrate more United Nations information centres with local United Nations Development Programme offices
- Studying the feasibility of integrating United Nations information centres with the lead United Nations agency in the host country or region
- Transferring certain responsibilities currently assigned to United Nations information centres in developed countries to civil society partners, such as United Nations Associations, on a case-by-case basis.

The Department of Public Information also needs to review the rationale for resource allocations to United Nations information centres and evaluate options for cost savings by seeking to obtain:

- Funding from Member States in the region through the provision of rent-free premises or a subsidy for rent and maintenance costs, with the establishment of new centres being conditional on such funding
- Savings through cost sharing with other United Nations entities in the host country or region.

Any restructuring exercise arising from the Department's comprehensive review should also focus on rationalizing the number of posts and the levels of heads and staff of the centres.

In the opinion of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the successful implementation of those measures will facilitate the re-allocation of funds to United Nations information centres in locations where they can play a more important role in the Organization's information outreach programmes.

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# I. Introduction

1. United Nations information centres and the information components of Information Services and United Nations Offices are responsible for promoting greater public understanding and support for the aims and activities of the United Nations and disseminating information on the work of the Organization to worldwide audiences.

2. In 2002, there were 65 United Nations information centres, 62 of which were operational. In addition, there were five Information Services and eight United Nations Offices. The financial and operational aspects of the information activities carried out by those entities are supported and administered by the Information Centres Service. As shown in table 1 below, the budget for the biennium 2002-2003 for the entire operation amounted to $46.5 million, or approximately 30 per cent of the total budget of the Department of Public Information.

Table 1
**Resource requirements**

| *Category* | *Resources (thousands of US dollars)* | | *Established posts* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *2000-2001* | *2002-2003* | *2000-2001* | *2002-2003* |
| Regular budget | | | | |
| Information Centres Service | 4 631.6 | 4 598.7 | 23 | 23 |
| Field implementation: | | | | |
| United Nations information centres | 33 841.4 | 33 411.4 | 263 | 263 |
| United Nations Information Service: Geneva and Vienna | 6 034.7 | 6 048.4 | 32 | 32 |
| United Nations Offices | 2 394.2 | 2 443.7 | 12 | 12 |
| **Total** | **46 901.9** | **46 502.2** | **330** | **330** |
| Extrabudgetary | 1 572.9 | 1 710.8 | - | - |

*Source*: A/56/6, sect. 26.

3. The Office of Internal Oversight Services reviewed the structure and operations of United Nations information centres. The audit was conducted at the offices of the Department of Public Information in New York and supplemented with visits to the centres in Bogotá, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Port-of-Spain and Rome. The review assessed whether the services provided by United Nations information centres adequately implement the Department's legislative mandates in the most cost-effective manner, taking into consideration evolving global and regional information needs. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also examined whether resources are allocated to centres in a rational and equitable manner and whether those resources are used efficiently and accounted for properly. The Office of Internal Oversight Services issued its final audit report to the management of the Department of Public Information on 14 October 2002.

# II. Review findings and observations

## A. Securing the continued relevance of United Nations information centres: reassessing their mandates, goals and objectives

4. The Office of Internal Oversight Services sought to evaluate the overall relevance and effectiveness of United Nations information centres in today's world. However, thorough evaluation was not always possible because the tools and data needed to measure and demonstrate the performance and impact of the centres were inadequate. Nevertheless, the Office developed sufficient evidence to conclude that an overall public information strategy needs to be formulated and coordinated. The audit showed that at the centre level, the Department of Public Information needs to re-examine the broad mandates, goals and strategies of the operation to consider regional information needs and changing regional and global circumstances.

5. The Office of Internal Oversight Services review highlighted the need for an urgent reassessment of the United Nations information centre concept in terms of impact, usefulness and continued relevance with regard to operational effectiveness and resource allocations. Information centres based in developing countries need to be managed differently from those located in developed countries. Furthermore, the need for centres in developed countries and their current numbers also require urgent reconsideration, particularly since they are absorbing the bulk of available staff and funding resources.

6. The audit also showed that the Department of Public Information needs to assess alternative approaches to the current United Nations information centre operation. For example, in developed countries, that may involve having civil society partners, such as resident United Nations Associations, assume some of the roles and responsibilities currently assigned to information centres. The Department also needs to determine whether centres based in major cities are placing undue emphasis on performing a political reporting role at the expense of other outreach activities. In addition, it should encourage and assist information centres to make better use of non-governmental organizations to assume some of the roles currently mandated to centres. Another option would involve integrating more centres within United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices in the host country or region in consultation with the Member States concerned. The Department could also seek to restructure the United Nations information centre operation on a regional basis, which would reduce the number of centres through mergers and closings (see recommendation 1).

## B. Achieving adequate coverage throughout the country or region

7. In order to implement legislative mandates adequately, United Nations information centre programme outputs should be disseminated as widely as possible throughout the designated geographical area. However, owing to logistical and financial constraints, it is often difficult for some centres to achieve the same levels of influence and activity as those located in the capital city of the host country, because some of them need to be located in major media capitals. Providing effective coverage within the host country could also be a problem owing to the country's large area and high travel costs. Furthermore, 23 information centres and

three of the Information Service offices are responsible for more than one country. Although the resources needed to operate the United Nations information centre outreach programme are limited, the Office of Internal Oversight Services did not identify any instances where Member States complained about the lack of coverage by existing centres. That raises the question of how relevant United Nations information centres are to some countries (see recommendations 2 and 3).

## C. Opportunities for closer cooperation with other United Nations entities

8. The Office of Internal Oversight Services review identified various problems, including overlap and duplication, attributable to having a number of United Nations entities in a country or region. The Office obtained the views of some heads of centre regarding the "United Nations house" concept, which involves having all United Nations entities in a country or region in one location. The heads of centre generally noted that to be successful, that concept required the further development of a sharing, cooperative culture and attitude, as well as good personal relationships among the heads of the various entities. Any initiatives to integrate United Nations activities in a particular location need to be supported by instruments that clearly define and secure the high profile of the United Nations information centre operation (see recommendation 4).

## D. Charging for services provided to other United Nations entities and cost-sharing

9. While certain United Nations information centres provide services to other United Nations entities in their regions, there is no policy on charging for those services. In the view of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Department of Public Information should assess whether, and to what extent, the provision of services to other United Nations entities should be part of the centre's mandate. If included in its mandate, the Department should establish a policy setting out the circumstances in which information centres may charge a fee for certain services provided to other entities. Centres could utilize those fees to enhance their activities by, for example, subsidizing travel costs (see recommendation 5).

## E. Need for annual work plans and performance criteria

10. United Nations information centres are not required to prepare and submit annual plans to the Department of Public Information for review. The Office of Internal Oversight Services considers the lack of annual plans a serious shortcoming, which in some cases has resulted in the ad hoc coverage of mandates and an imbalance in programme activities. That became evident when the Office reviewed the activities undertaken by United Nations information centres during the period from 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2001.

11. Taking local needs into account, priorities for United Nations information centre activities are left to the discretion of heads of centre and, as a result, there has been an imbalance in the mix of activities, such as media outreach and education, undertaken by information centres. Centres have also been asked to perform

additional duties by other departments, resulting in the delivery of services that lie outside the operation's mandate, such as offering national recruitment examinations and providing logistical support for visiting senior United Nations officials and dignitaries.

12. The Department of Public Information should be more proactive in ensuring that the programme of activities covers all relevant mandates, goals and objectives and request each information centre to prepare an annual plan showing its projected activities and submit it to the Information Centres Service for review. That would enable the Service to:

(a) Verify whether all relevant mandates and the communication priorities of the Organization will be covered and if there is adequate distribution of activities within that coverage;

(b) Ensure that centres develop balanced programmes of activities, taking regional and local considerations into account;

(c) Identify instances where better coordination with the Department of Public Information headquarters or with other United Nations information centres can be achieved;

(d) Identify any constraints, such as insufficient funds for travel, inhibiting United Nations information centres from achieving mandated objectives (see recommendation 6).

## F. Reporting United Nations information centre activities to the Department of Public Information

13. United Nations information centres are required to submit monthly activity reports and quarterly overview reports to Department of Public Information headquarters. Details from those reports are entered into a database that records centre activities by means of standard coding of activities and themes. During the 18-month period from 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2001, only 21 centres submitted reports for each month. (In 2002, 48 information centres submitted 10 or more reports.) Furthermore, all 60 reports reviewed by the Office of Internal Oversight Services contained incorrect activity and theme codes. Some centres reported the same activity under two different codes. Although Department of Public Information staff adjusted those exceptions before entering the data, some reports had apparently not been reviewed from the operational standpoint and the details were simply entered into the database. Ten centres submitted all quarterly overview reports in 2001, while in 2002, 13 centres did so. Only one of the five centres visited by the Office had submitted a quarterly overview report after 1999. That raises the question of whether some of those reports or their contents are actually relevant.

14. The Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that the Programme Support Section of the Information Centres Service had issued detailed guidelines on reporting requirements to the heads of centres and other entities through a memorandum dated 8 November 1999. The guidelines were reissued on 26 August 2002. Those centres that are not submitting reports should be reminded to do so (see recommendation 7).

## G. Introduction of criteria for evaluating performance and impact of United Nations information centre activities

15. The criteria currently in place to assess the performance of United Nations information centres are insufficient and should be revamped to include stronger elements of impact assessment. The principal tools of the Department of Public Information for monitoring the activities of individual information centres are the monthly activity report, the quarterly overview report, and various ad hoc reports. A review of the activities reported by information centres for a recent 18-month period showed that more should be done to ensure that centres are maximizing the use of their resources and that their activities are sufficiently varied and creative.

16. Establishing specific performance criteria would enable the Department of Public Information to assess the effectiveness of United Nations information centres in providing the best possible service with available resources. Performance criteria should be established for each principal activity used to achieve the goals and objectives of the United Nations information centre operation. The main categories in the monthly activity report, including media outreach, productions, education and public outreach could be used for that purpose.

17. When establishing performance criteria, the Department of Public Information should consider the availability of United Nations information centre human and financial resources and other factors such as geographical location, political environment and the level of economic development of the country or region served (see recommendation 8).

## H. Filling posts allocated to the Information Centres Service

18. The budget for the biennium 2002-2003 provides 23 posts for the Information Centres Service: one post at the Principal Officer level and nine other Professional and 13 General Service posts, all funded from the regular budget.

19. The Chief of the Service's Programme Support Section was on sick leave throughout 2001. Furthermore, although four Information Officers were assigned to monitor United Nations information centres, in effect, only two officers were performing that function. The other two officers were assigned to other duties.

20. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also found that Information Officers have not been performing field visits. As a result, there has been little opportunity to monitor United Nations information centre activities closely through:

- Regular, in-depth reviews of quarterly overview reports and monthly activity reports
- Follow-up with United Nations information centres which failed to report on matters requiring corrective action
- Closer contact with heads of centre.

21. Professional staff within the Information Centres Service, particularly the Information Officers, are responsible for ensuring that United Nations information centres operate to their full potential, mandates are properly covered and problems are addressed in a timely manner. The Directors and staff of the five information centres visited by the Office of Internal Oversight Services indicated that the

Service's oversight needed to be improved and stressed the need for the Service to provide written guidelines on activities that should be performed and written feedback on the adequacy of the work undertaken and the reports submitted. Centre personnel also noted that there was an urgent need to fill the position of Chief of the Programme Support Section. In the view of the Office, the posts allocated to the Service need to be utilized more effectively to provide better guidance to information centres. A programme of field visits by Information Officers should also be established (see recommendation 9).

## I. Rent and rent-related expenses of United Nations information centre premises

22. Allocations for the rental of information centre premises during 2001 amounted to $1,280,502. The Office of Internal Oversight Services observed that 33 centres operated from rent-free premises and seven others only paid a nominal rental charge. The highest rental charges were incurred by centres located in developed countries. The allocations for the centres in London and Washington, D.C., for example, amounted to $377,242, equivalent to 30 per cent of the total United Nations information centre rent allocation. The Secretary-General also commented on the matter in a report (A/AC.198/2002/2) to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fourth session. He noted that rental and rent-related expenses made up approximately 40 per cent of the operating costs of information centres and that a large portion of those costs were being incurred in the capitals of developed countries.

23. Whenever possible, the Secretary-General reports to the Committee on Information on his appeals to the host Governments of United Nations information centres to provide rent-free or rent-subsidized premises. Those appeals have been made over several years. In the opinion of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Department of Public Information, through the Secretary-General, should propose to the relevant Member States that the continued operation of existing United Nations information centres and the opening of new centres are contingent on the host Government providing rent-free or rent-subsidized premises (see recommendation 10).

## J. Reviewing the allocation of resources to individual United Nations information centres

24. In March 2001, the Secretary-General submitted to the Committee on Information a report entitled "Equitable disbursement of resources to United Nations information centres" (A/AC.198/2001/5). The report included certain criteria aimed at ensuring a fair allocation of resources among United Nations information centres. However, at the time of the audit, the allocation of resources was still very much skewed towards information centres based in developed countries. The Office of Internal Oversight Services audit tests showed that developed countries also had an advantage with regard to funding for travel, translation and printing. The Office did not see evidence of resource allocations criteria that took into consideration the fact that there are more personal computers offering Internet access to the general public in those countries receiving the bulk of the resources. Other comparative advantages

of developed countries include the presence of United Nations agencies and a more modern and accessible media infrastructure.

25. Overall, the Department of Public Information resource allocations favour a small number of United Nations information centres located in developed countries, which in some instances were not provided with rent-free or rent-subsidized premises or payment for staffing by the Government of the host country (see recommendation 11).

26. Thirty out of the 48 operational United Nations information centres that were not integrated with UNDP were allocated one Professional post and the incumbents of those posts were generally the heads of centre. Eight information centres were headed by D-1s. However, none of the centres located in Central and South America, and Africa had directors at the D-1 level. At the time of the audit, it was not entirely clear what criteria were used to determine the grade levels of individuals heading centres and which centres should be allocated a post at the D-1 level (see recommendation 12).

27. Staff costs constitute a significant component of the information centres' field operations expenditures. Once the centre mandates, goals and objectives have been revised and updated in line with the recommendations made in the present report, the Department of Public Information should review the allocation of staff resources among centres. That exercise should consider such strategic options as the potential for better coordination and rationalization of resources with other United Nations offices in the country or region.

28. At the information centre level, the implementation of the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services for preparing annual plans, introducing benchmarking and performance monitoring against those plans, will assist the Department of Public Information in determining the optimum centre staffing requirements. That exercise would identify centres where human resources may exceed requirements and others that require additional staff (see recommendation 13).

## K. The relevance of reference libraries needs to be demonstrated

29. The majority of people who visit United Nations information centres do so to use the library services. However, not all centres were reporting the number of visits to their libraries. For the period from 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2001, only 48 entities reported the number of library visitors. Moreover, not all of those entities submitted reports for each of the 18 months. The available data shows that, on average, 317 people visited the libraries each month, but there was a wide discrepancy in that average between individual centres. Thirteen centres reported less than 100 visitors per month. In the view of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, each centre should maintain an electronic database of visitors and their profiles (e.g. age, sex, student/occupation, topic of interest). That would help management to monitor the effect that United Nations and United Nations information centre web sites have on the number of visitors and formulate a strategy to increase the number of visitors by, for example, targeting certain sectors of the public (see recommendation 14).

## L. Role of National Information Officers

30. National Information Officers play an important role in the efficient operation of United Nations information centres. Apart from the operational aspects of the job itself, the Officers assist in the day-to-day operations and activities of the centre and serve as the director's back-up. In some instances, they administer the centre. At the United Nations Information Centre in Rome, for example, the Officer acted as the officer-in-charge pending the appointment of a new director. In the other four information centres visited, the directors stated that their National Information Officers were doing an effective job and all had connections with the local media, which they used effectively. That was confirmed by our observations and review of pertinent documents.

31. National Information Officers, however, had limited career advancement opportunities. There are two National Information Officer grades, equivalent to the P-1 and P-2 Professional grades. The Officers are not eligible to sit for the G-to-P examination. That has led to resignations, as was the case in two of the United Nations information centres visited by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

32. In rationalizing the mandate, goals and strategies of the information centre operation, the Department of Public Information should devise ways of retaining highly qualified and experienced National Information Officers and expanding their role. Criteria should be established to allow National Information Officers to serve as the heads of centre. Those criteria could also serve as the basis for creating a new post, equivalent to the P-3 level (see recommendation 15).

## M. Other matters

33. In addition to the findings detailed in the preceding paragraphs, the Office of Internal Oversight Services review identified other matters related to United Nations information centre operations, such as strengthening the role of the head of centre, further enhancing multilingualism, improving centre web sites and newsletters and various other issues of an operational or administrative nature. Those findings and the respective recommendations were included in a detailed internal audit report submitted to the management of the Department of Public Information.

# III. Recommendations

34. The Office of Internal Oversight Services makes the following key recommendations, which are intended to improve the United Nations information centre programme and to strengthen management controls at the operating level. Management's comments are shown in italics. The recommendation numbers shown in parentheses are internal codes of the Office of Internal Oversight Services taken from the original audit report.

**Recommendation 1**

35. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Undertake an in-depth evaluation of the mandate of the United Nations information centre operation and update relevant goals, objectives and strategies to take into account regional information needs and changing regional and global circumstances;

(b) Assess and apply appropriate measures to achieve the revised goals, objectives and strategies of the United Nations information centre operation (AH2001/43/2/01).

36. ***Implementation status.*** *In his proposals for enhancing public information, contained in the report entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387 and Corr.1), the Secretary-General has assigned the Information Centres Service and the information centres to the Department's new Strategic Communications Division in order to integrate them into the Organization's communications strategy. In the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, the centres will be part of the new subprogramme 1 (strategic communications services). The Secretary-General has also proposed rationalizing the United Nations information centre network of regional hubs throughout the world over the next three years, starting with the creation of a Western European hub (General Assembly resolution 57/300, para. 15). This proposal is expected to position United Nations information centres to deliver effective and targeted information programmes with the greatest impact.*

**Recommendation 2**

37. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that, in implementing the measures to achieve the revised goals, objectives and strategies of the United Nations information centre operation as per recommendation 1 above, the Department of Public Information should ensure that adequate resources, including travel funds, are identified and secured (AH2001/43/2/02).

38. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information pointed out that the provision of adequate resources to United Nations information centres is a central issue in its current comprehensive review of the Department. As a result of the proposed creation of the Western European information regional hub, the Department will suggest in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 that some of the resources released be transferred to United Nations information centres in developing countries.*

**Recommendation 3**

39. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information monitor closely the activities of United Nations information centres, particularly those responsible for more that one country, to ensure that activities are being carried out throughout the designated area or region, and identify instances where assistance can be provided to achieve that objective adequately (AH2001/43/2/03).

40. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information noted that since the completion of the audit, its Programme Support Section has been strengthened. Furthermore, in line with its new focus on performance management, the Department will be instituting new measures to monitor and assess more effectively the activities of the centres, including those responsible for more than one country.*

**Recommendation 4**

41. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that, in implementing the measures to achieve the revised goals, objectives and strategies of the United Nations information centre operation as per recommendation 1 above, the Department of Public Information assess opportunities for reducing duplication of activities between United Nations information centres and other United Nations entities in a country or region through integration (AH2001/43/2/04).

42. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information indicated that its policy is to ensure that United Nations information centres act as focal points for all United Nations system information activities in the host country. The Department has encouraged the establishment of United Nations country team communications groups to develop local communications strategies and to implement jointly the information activities of the country team. The Department has encouraged and participated in the establishment of United Nations houses where feasible.*

**Recommendation 5**

43. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Assess the nature and extent of services United Nations information centres provide to other United Nations entities in their country or region;

(b) Develop a policy and issue guidelines to United Nations information centre heads on charging for services rendered to other United Nations entities and on sharing costs with such entities (AH2001/43/2/05).

44. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information explained that many United Nations information centres have been successful in obtaining the financial support of United Nations agencies in implementing information activities on their behalf. Currently, in accordance with United Nations Secretariat policy whereby all charges are centralized at Headquarters, United Nations information centres cannot charge individual United Nations field offices for services rendered. The Department intends to seek the assistance of the United Nations Controller with a view to establishing a procedure for the reimbursement of services provided by United Nations information centres to United Nations field offices.*

**Recommendation 6**

45. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Require all United Nations information centres to prepare and submit for review and approval an annual plan setting out the activities which they plan to carry out during the forthcoming year in line with their mandates, goals and objectives;

(b) Review the annual plan submitted by each United Nations information centre to ensure that the proposed activities comprehensively cover all mandates in the most cost-effective manner (AH2001/43/2/07 and 08).

46. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information indicated that until now, in order to give United Nations information centres the flexibility to adapt*

*to changing conditions and work demands, they have been required to submit, as part of their quarterly overview report, a plan of major activities for the next three-month period rather than annual plans. Beginning in 2003, the Department has decided, on a trial basis, to request United Nations information centres to submit annual plans for review by the Information Centres Service.*

**Recommendation 7**

47. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Review the current United Nations information centre reporting requirements against operation mandates, objectives and strategies and determine whether any changes are required in report contents and the frequency of reporting;

(b) Once annual plans are requested from United Nations information centres and the performance criteria are in place, implement procedures to ensure that all reports are reviewed, data is analysed against the plan and performance criteria and appropriate feedback is given to heads of United Nations information centres;

(c) Issue guidance and reminders to those United Nations information centres that do not submit reports on time (AH2001/43/2/09).

48. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information advised that placing the Information Centres Service in the new Division for Strategic Communications and filling vacant posts in the Service, particularly those of Chief, Information Centres Service, and of Chief, Programme Support Section, will contribute to the implementation of this recommendation. The Department also indicated that the reporting guidelines were being updated and would be sent to all United Nations information centres.*

**Recommendation 8**

49. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Establish performance criteria for assessing the activities of each United Nations information centre in line with the mandates, goals and objectives of the United Nations information centre operation;

(b) Communicate those criteria to heads of United Nations information centres;

(c) Implement measures to monitor the activity of each United Nations information centre against the relative criteria and take immediate corrective actions accordingly (AH2001/43/2/10).

50. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information explained that one of the key aspects of the Department's reform effort concerns performance management. The Department has already stated before the Committee on Information at its 2002 session that performance management must be a vital part of all major activities and programmes. While resources for evaluation activities are limited, the Department is taking steps to build systematic evaluation into the work of each departmental unit, including the United Nations information centres. As a first step, key staff have attended several training sessions on evaluation techniques.*

**Recommendation 9**

51. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Take immediate steps to ensure that all approved Information Centres Service posts are filled by appropriately qualified personnel, preferably those with field experience;

(b) Formulate a programme of Information Officer visits to United Nations information centres and include the cost thereof in the next budget (AH2001/43/2/11 and 12).

52. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information advised that in November 2002, new Chiefs of the Information Centres Service and the Programme Support Section were appointed. Also, all Information Officers have returned to their duties and the Service was placed under the Strategic Communications Division. A new Chief of the Centres Operations Section is being recruited. The Department explained that, owing to the lack of travel funds, Information Officers had not been performing field visits except in connection with annual and home leave. In one year, those Officers made 20 visits to centres, travelling on their own time and expense. The Department's submission to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 provides for more visits to the field, although travel for the entire Department has been drastically reduced.*

**Recommendation 10**

53. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information, through the Secretary-General, submit a proposal to the General Assembly requesting that the continued operation of United Nations information centres become conditional on the concerned Member States providing rent-free premises or a subsidy for rent and maintenance costs. The establishment of new centres, if any, should also be conditional on such funding (AH2001/43/2/13).

54. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information indicated that the Secretary-General has repeatedly appealed to concerned Member States to contribute to United Nations information centre operations in their countries in cash and in kind.*

**Recommendation 11**

55. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that, on the basis of the updated mandates, goals, objectives and strategies of the United Nations information centre operation, the Department of Public Information:

(a) Establish criteria for allocating funds and posts to United Nations information centres to help them attain the activities set out in their annual plans as per recommendation 3 above;

(b) Reallocate posts and funds on the basis of those criteria (AH2001/43/2/14).

56. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information advised that such criteria are outlined in the report of the Secretary-General to the Committee on Information, entitled "Equitable disbursement of resources to United Nations*

*information centres" (A/AC.198/2001/5). However, the criteria will be reviewed as part of the implementation of the new operating concept for the information centres.*

**Recommendation 12**

57. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Re-examine the mandate of the United Nations information centres and establish criteria for determining the level of the head of centre based on the goals and objectives of the United Nations information centres and the scope, complexity and accountability of the post;

(b) Assess the need for having heads of centres at the D-1 level (AH2001/43/2/15).

58. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information advised that the grade of centre Directors will be reviewed as part of the new information centres operating concept.*

**Recommendation 13**

59. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that, based on the updated mandates, goals, objectives and strategies of the United Nations information centre operation, the Department of Public Information determine the optimum staffing levels of each United Nations information centre taking into account the political, economic and social conditions within the host country, the plan of action of the United Nations information centre and coordination of activities with other United Nations entities within the country or region (AH2001/43/2/16).

60. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information indicated that matters such as the allocation of resources are addressed in the proposed new operating concept for United Nations information centres, which would provide for the regionalization of the United Nations information centre network. Following the loss of about 40 per cent of staffing resources in the 1990s, centres are at best properly staffed, although in reality most have experienced cuts often resulting in serious understaffing.*

**Recommendation 14**

61. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the Department of Public Information:

(a) Instruct heads of United Nations information centres to maintain an electronic database of visitors to the facilities' library together with a visitor profile;

(b) Issue instructions to heads of United Nations information centres emphasizing the importance of reporting the number of library visitors in the monthly activity report;

(c) Closely monitor those United Nations information centres where the number of visitors is below the expected levels and recommend corrective action (AH2001/43/2/24).

62. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department advised that the issue of United Nations information centre reference services was addressed in the recent review of*

*United Nations libraries requested by the General Assembly. The findings and recommendations will be submitted to the General Assembly at its next session.*

**Recommendation 15**

63. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that, in addressing the recommendation to rationalize the mandate, goals and strategies of the United Nations information centre operation, the Department of Public Information:

(a) Set out criteria for highly qualified and experienced National Information Officers to head United Nations information centres;

(b) Request the Office of Human Resources Management of the Secretariat to establish an additional level for the National Information Officer position (AH2001/43/2/18).

64. ***Implementation status.*** *The Department of Public Information advised that the role of National Information Officers is among the issues addressed in the revised concept for United Nations information centres which the Department has proposed to the Secretary-General. The Department intends to recommend to the Office of Human Resources Management the addition of grade C to the two grades currently available in that category in United Nations information centres to expand career development opportunities for the staff concerned. It should also be noted that, under the new staff selection system, senior National Information Officers (NO-B) are eligible to be considered as external candidates for vacancies at the P-3 level.*

65. The Office of Internal Oversight Services will follow up on management's progress in implementing the foregoing recommendations.

(*Signed*) Dileep **Nair**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services